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HENRY VAUGHAN, SILURIST.

"THE entire forgetfulness into which poetry which, though not of the very highest order of all, is yet of a very high one, may fall, is strikingly exemplified in the fact that, as nearly as possible, two centuries intervened between the first and the second editions of Vaughan's poems. The first edition of the first part of 'Silex Scintillans' appeared in 1650, the second edition of the book in 1847." So writes Archbishop Trench in the notes to his delightful volume of selections called "Household Poetry." It is to Henry Lyte, author of the well-known hymn "Abide with me! fast falls the eventide," that the credit is due of having disinterred the long-forgotten poetry of Henry Vaughan. In 1847 Lyte published a volume containing all, or nearly all, Vaughan's religious poems, prefacing the work by an interesting account of the life of the poet. More recently, the indefatigable Mr. Grossart has devoted four closely packed volumes of "The Fuller Worthies' Library" to the complete works, in verse and prose, of Henry Vaughan. This work contains everything that came from Vaughan's pen, with all things known about him, both those we care, and some things we do not care to remember. When Lyte's edition appeared, the late Dr. John Brown found in the newly discovered Vaughan a kindred spirit, and in one of his beautiful essays has shed around the Silurist the light of his appreciative and sympathetic genius.

Henry Vaughan belongs to that small band of Royalist poets of the Caroline era who stand discriminated from the host of dashing, rollicking, cavalier lyrists, by being essentially religious poets. What attracted them to the Royal cause was not its worldly splendor; but they identified it with that refinement of feeling and that deep and sober piety which seem to have descended to us from Catholic ages. The others of the group to

which Vaughan belongs are Crashaw, Sandys, and George Herbert, not to mention Quarles, with his homely "Emblems," or Herrick, whose genius seems more secular than religious. But Henry Vaughan, interesting as he is from his character and his peculiar environment, has this special note to arrest our attention, that in him we hear, for the first time, some ethereal tones, some finer cadences, which, after his death, went silent in English poetry for more than a hundred years, only to revive in some of the higher strains of Wordsworth and Coleridge and Keble. Admirers of Shelley will catch a cadence here and there in Vaughan which reminds them of their favorite.

Henry Vaughan and his brother Thomas came of a fine old Cymric race belonging to South Wales. It is as a native of South Wales, and dearly loving it, that he styled himself Henry Vaughan, *Silurist*, from the name *Silures*, which Tacitus, about the close of the first Christian century, applied to the inhabitants of South Wales. The Vaughans traced their lineage back to Sir Roger Vaughan of Bredwardine, who went with Henry V. to his wars in France, and died on the field of Agincourt. This Sir Roger is said to have been knighted by the king, along with a comrade, Sir David Gam,—reckoned also among Vaughan's ancestors,—as he lay dying on the field. Welsh heralds traced the race of Sir Roger back to mythic times, even to one Carodoc Fraich-Fas, a knight of Arthur's Round Table. From Sir Roger in the ninth degree came Henry Vaughan of Tretower and Newton in Brecknockshire, the father of the poet. It has been doubted whether there are any descendants of the poet still extant; but Mr. Grosart, the latest editor of Vaughan's works, has, in a minute and laborious biography, made it probable that Dr. Charles Vaughan, of the Temple Church, the present Dean of Landaff, is a lineal descendant and representative of the poet, as is also Mr. H. Halford Vaughan, sometime Professor of Modern History in Oxford. It is also noted that the poet's family were by inter-marriage akin to George Herbert, whom he calls his master. The old family seat of the Vaughans, Tretower Castle, is now a moldering ruin. Thomas Vaughan, grandfather of the poet, left it for the humbler mansion of Scethrog, or Newton, a little distant from Tretower, in the beautiful valley of the Usk. Here Henry, the poet, and his twin brother were born in 1621. Of their mother, strange to say, nothing, not even the name, is known.

Seethrog by the Usk is said to be a fitting birthplace for a poet. His eyes in childhood must have looked on distant mountains, "the Brecknockshire Beacons," and all about him were wooded knolls, and side glens with their waters running down to the Usk. Shakespeare is said once to have visited the Vale of Usk, and to have taken the name Puck, according to Malone, from Cum Pooky, "the Goblin Vale," one of those side glens belonging to the Vaughans. The Usk, with its sights and sounds, murmurs often through Vaughan's verse. Here is one of his many notices of it:

"Garlands, and songs, and roundelays,
Mild, dewie nights and sunshine days,
The Turtle's voice, joy without fear,
Dwell on thy bosom all the year.

"To thee the wind from far shall bring
The odours of the scattered spring,
And loaden with the rich arreare
Spend it in spicie whispers here."

When the two lads were eleven years old, 1632, they were sent to a parsonage a short distance from their home, where the Rev. Matthew Herbert undertook their education. This good man his two pupils ever afterward regarded with reverence and affection. In 1638 the twin brothers passed from their retired vale to Jesus College, Oxford, then, as now, the favorite resort of young Welshmen. Little or nothing is known as to how they fared at Oxford. Like all the young patricians of Wales at that time, they were devoted cavaliers, and all they saw and heard at Oxford would increase their loyalty. Oxford had not yet forgotten that famous reception it had given to Charles I., two years before, which has since become one of its most cherished historic memories. 1638, the year of the Vaughans entering Jesus, was the year when the Covenant first broke out in Scotland, and with it all the troubles of the king. That same year, too, Charles was at Woodstock, whither all the magnates of Oxford resorted to pay him homage. Perhaps even then the two brothers may have caught sight of the king. Or if they remained in Oxford till the close of 1642, they may have been present when he retired to Oxford, after the battle of Edgehill, and

may have gazed on that beautiful sad face which Vandyke has immortalized, and which has impressed itself indelibly on all generations since. However this may be, it seems certain that in the year 1641 Vaughan addressed some verses to the king, which appeared in a volume called "*Eucharistica Oxoniensis*." This steadfast loyalty breathes through all his poetry, and did not abate when Charles I. had been succeeded by his less attractive son. Mr. Grossart, the diligent and devoted editor of Vaughan's works, himself a non-conformist and a descendant of the Puritans, pulls a ludicrously long face over Vaughan's "Royalism," as he calls it. This is the one blot which he sees in his favorite poet. Even his decided High Churchmanship he lets pass with comparatively little comment. Vaughan came to Oxford when this way of thinking had there set strongly in. It had not always been so. At the beginning of the seventeenth century Puritanism had it all its own way within the University. Humphrey, a disciple of Zwingli, who was Professor of Theology, with the two Abbots, one Master of University and Vice-Chancellor, the other Master of Balliol, all of the Genevan school, commanded the situation. But Laud, who was ordained in 1600, within thirty years reversed all that. From the first he had set Humphrey, the Abbots, and Reynolds at defiance; and by 1630 he had gathered around himself a body of theologians of his own views, who have since been known as the Caroline Divines. Laud, as he had himself been befriended by the saintly Bishop Andrews, in his turn helped forward and encouraged Jeremy Taylor, Sanderson, Bramhall, Bethel, Hammond, and Nicholas Farrar with his devoted family. Oxford, then, as now, the home of violent reactions, was, when the Vaughans entered it, in strong recoil from Puritanism, and the tide of High Church theology was in full flow. "Laud," says Mozeley, "was the first High Churchman"; and in this sense he was, that "a theological school which was a mere handful when he commenced life at Oxford, had, mainly through his influence, spread over the country in all directions. Oxford itself, from being a focus of Calvinism, had come round, and scarcely knew its reflection in the theology of Jeremy Taylor and Hammond."

It is not likely that this theology much affected the two lads during their Oxford residence, but, in after years, when they came to think for themselves, these were the views which they

firmly adopted. There is no record that either of the brothers graduated. When they left Oxford, Thomas took up arms on the king's side, and as to Henry, while it is uncertain whether he joined the royal army, it is certain that he suffered imprisonment for the royal cause. He would seem to have sojourned for some time in London, as is proved by a rhapsody of his, commemorating convivial evenings at the Globe Tavern. The great wits who once haunted it were all gone,—Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and the rest,—but to Vaughan's imagination their memories were still there. There is a sort of bacchanalian swagger about this piece which sounds strange to those who know Vaughan's maturer style.

In 1646 Vaughan gave to the world his earliest poetic venture, in a small collection of love verses, addressed, many of them, to Amoret and Etesia. Who these fair ones were, whether one damsel or two, or one under different names, does not appear. These verses are full of ardors and wistful sighs expressed in the conceits usual to the love poetry of that time. Vaughan afterward abjured them with what seems superfluous contrition; for there is nothing in them to call for repentance, unless all love poetry be sinful.

When the two brothers had to choose professions, Thomas was ordained, soon afterward evicted from his charge by the Scrutinizers of the Parliament, retired to Oxford, wrote works on alchemy and magic, and died in 1665. Henry became a country doctor,—though whence he got his diploma does not appear,—and settled before 1647 in Brecon, then called Brecknock, the country town of his native region. From a poem of his, written about this time, his new quarters do not seem to have been much to his mind. All things in the town and neighborhood he found set to the new Puritan and Republican régime. This is the way he describes it:

“Here's brotherly Ruffs, and Beards, and a strange sight
Of high monumental hats, ta'en at the fight
Of eighty-eight; while every Burgesse foots
The mortal pavement in eternal boots.”

In a more serious strain, speaking of the abolition of the Christmas Festival by the Puritans, he exclaims,

“Alas! my God, thy birth now here
Must not be numbered in the year.”

This uncongenial neighborhood he soon quitted, to settle in his native Scethrog, or Newton, a home which he never afterward left. There he became the Gideon Gray of his native district, and between his duties as a country doctor and his occupation as a poet, found his time amply filled. This is what the late Dr. John Brown, well entitled to speak on such a subject, says of his daily rounds:

“Though what Sir Walter says of the country surgeon is too true, that he is worse fed and harder wrought than any one else in the parish, except his horse, still, to a man like Vaughan, to whom the love of nature and its scrutiny was a constant passion, few occupations could have furnished ampler and more exquisite manifestations of her magnificence and beauty. Many of his finest descriptions give us quite the notion of their having been composed while going his rounds on his Welsh pony among the glens and hills, and their unspeakable solitudes.”

Soon after settling in Wales, Vaughan married, but the name of his wife is not known. Her married life was brief, but the impression left on Vaughan by her character was lasting. His pathetic poem, entitled “Mourning for the Young Dead,” surely alludes to her.

“Sleep, happy ashes! blessed sleep!
While hapless I still weep;
Weep that I have outlived
My life, and unrelieved
Must — soul-less shadow — so live on,
Though life be dead, and my joy gone.”

Lyte says that in time Vaughan married again, but Mr. Grosart, though he sought for evidence of this, found none. He is willing, however, to accept it on Lyte's authority. Before 1650 Vaughan was visited by a serious and prolonged illness, which brought him to the verge of the grave. The death of his first wife, so young and good, followed by this long illness, wrought a great change in him, and he came out of this double affliction another man. The religious bent which his mind then took, it never afterward lost. Just about that time he became acquainted with the poems of George Herbert, whom he not only greatly admired as a poet, but welcomed as a spiritual guide and comforter. Taking Herbert as his model in form, he composed during his illness “sacred poems and private ejaculations,”

which are a faithful transcript of the experience through which he had recently passed. These he gave to the world, in 1650, in a volume styled "*Silex Scintillans*," suggesting by this title that the poems were sparks struck from a flinty heart. About the same time, his twin brother Thomas was publishing another collection of Henry's poems, under the title "*Olor Iscanus*; or, the Swan of Usk." This latter volume contained his more outward thoughts and observations; and though Henry, in his now altered mind, would gladly have burnt these, as well as his love poems, there does not seem to be anything in either of which he needed to be ashamed. In 1655 came the second part of "*Silex Scintillans*," and, in 1675, a small volume entitled "*Thalia Rediviva*," in the same style and spirit as the two parts of "*Silex Scintillans*." The twin brother, Thomas, died early in 1665. Henry lived till he was seventy-three, and died in his native place on April 23, 1695, and was laid in the neighboring churchyard of Llan-saint-fread. On his tombstone were inscribed these contrite words, prepared by himself:

"H. V. M. D. Siluris
 Servus Inutilis
 Peccator Maximus
 Hic jaceo
 Gloria Miserere."

"Henry Vaughan, M. D., Silurist;
 An Unprofitable Servant;
 Chief of Sinners,
 Here I lie.
 Glory to God . . . Have mercy upon me!"

Vaughan has sometimes been spoken of as a mere imitator of Herbert; and such was his reverence for the Poet of "*The Temple*" that he would have held it an honor to be so styled. In the preface to "*Silex Scintillans*," after speaking of the licentiousness that tainted most of the poetry of that day, Vaughan says: "The first that with an effectual success attempted a diversion of this foul and overflowing stream was the blessed man Mr. George Herbert, whose holy life and verse gained many converts, of whom I am the least." Herbert was, no doubt, Vaughan's instructor in religious truth and the kindler of his piety. "*The Temple*" Vaughan probably knew by heart; and naturally enough,

when he began himself to versify, he adopted its meters, and here and there reproduced its cadences, just as we find Keble, two centuries later, sometimes recalling Herbert's tones. But after making full allowance for the influence of Herbert upon Vaughan, and the consequent likeness of their thoughts, it remains true that, as a poet, Vaughan contains in himself a fountain of inspiration, an intensity of feeling, and a subtle music, which Herbert never attained to. Archbishop Trench, a good judge of such matters, has well said: "As a theologian, Vaughan may be inferior, but as a poet he is certainly superior to Herbert, who never wrote anything so purely poetical as 'The Retreat.'

Yet Vaughan never has been, and never will be, a popular poet. His subjects and his style alike forbid this—his subjects, because they all lie in a region of spiritual meditation which will probably never attract the many; his style, because it has no high coloring, and nothing of that sustained finish and perfect workmanship to which most of our great modern poets have accustomed us. From Vaughan, an ordinary reader will be repelled by his utterance, often broken and imperfect; by thoughts good in themselves but condensed to obscurity; by halting rhythms and broken music. Often you are pleased, shall I say? or provoked, to find one or two verses of fine thought, beautifully expressed, yet embedded in a surrounding mass of inferior workmanship. Only in a few poems, when his best mood is on him, does he kindle into expression, bright, vivid, intense, from end to end.

One of the most noticeable qualities of Vaughan is his inwardness. A meditative spirit by nature, this tendency was doubtless deepened by the religious change which he passed through. The phases of that experience are recorded in many poems in the first part of "*Silex*," such as "*The Emblem*," "*The Call*," "*The Relapse*," "*Affliction*," "*The Tempest*," "*The Pilgrimage*." The last of these contains an aspiration which Vaughan often expresses—some may call it unhealthy, others will feel it to be spiritual. It certainly has a warrant in the Psalms:

"As birds rob'd of their native wood,
Although their diet may be fine,
Yet neither sing, nor like their food,
But with the thought of home do pine;

"So do I mourn, and hang my head;
And, thou, Thou dost me fulness give,
Yet look I for far better bread,
Because by this man cannot live.

"O feed me then! and since I may
Have yet more days, more nights to count,
So strengthen me, Lord, all the way,
That I may travel to Thy Mount."

The personal experience which these poems reveal is for depth and spirituality unsurpassed by Baxter, or Bunyan, or any of the best of the Puritans. And in Vaughan, as in Herbert, it has this further advantage — the intensity of their personal religion is saved from individualism by the continual sense of an external and catholic standard of devotion. They found it a support and confirmation of their faith to feel that they were not resting on their own isolated experiences, but were only following the footsteps of "those who had gone before them — those multitudes in the primitive time who had believed and taught and worshiped as they did."

There is, however, another and rarer way in which Vaughan's inwardness shows itself. In common with all idealists, he feels strongly that the spirit in man is the only reality, that visible things are but shadows, a mere screen hiding from men the eternal world. This is the way he expresses it in his poem called "Cock-crowing":

"Only this Veyle which Thou hast broke,
And must be broken yet in me,
This Veyle, I say, is all the cloke
And cloud which shadows me from Thee.
This Veyle Thy full-eyed love denies,
And only gleams and fractions spies.

"O take it off! make no delay
But brush me with Thy light, that I
May shine unto a perfect day;
And warme me at Thy glorious Eye!
O take it off! or till it flee,
Though with no Lillie, stay with me."

The feeling to which I have alluded, and which these lines express, is part of Vaughan's Platonic mysticism—a spiritual

imaginativeness, vouchsafed only to the finer order of mind. To many, mysticism is a word of evil import, suggesting only something vague, shadowy, and unreal. But there is a true as well as a false mysticism. If one may say it with reverence, the writings of St. John are pervaded with that true mystic insight that enabled him to apprehend sayings and intimations of his Master which escaped the other Apostles. There are touches of mysticism interlining here and there the robust thought of Shakespeare. Spenser, too, has it; indeed, none of the higher poets are without it. The mystic element is finely interfused through the thoughts of Vaughan; indeed, it is the element in which his mind naturally expands itself and seems most at home. Take this opening of a poem called "The World":

“I saw Eternity the other night;
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light;
All calm as it was bright;
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years,
 Driv’n by the spheres
In a vast shadow moved, in which the world
 And all her train were hurled.”

This is the solemn background against which Vaughan sees all the transitory ongoings of man. The mystery of the universe by which he is encompassed haunts him; he longs to penetrate to the heart of it. This feeling often breaks out, and he finds in the nature of his own soul the key which opens farthest into the secret. Thus in his poem "Vanity of Spirit," he says:

"I summoned Nature; pierced through all her store;
 Broke up some seales, which none had touched before;
 And having past
 Through all her creatures, came at last
 To search myself, where I did find
 Traces and sounds of a strange kind.
 Here of this mighty stream I found some rills
 With echoes beaten from the eternal hills.
 Weake beames and fires flashed to my sight,
 Like a young East, or moone-shine night,
 Which showed me in a nook east by
 A peece of much antiquity,
 With hieroglyphicks quite dismembered,
 And broken letters scarce remembered.

I took them up, and, much-joyed, went about
 T' unite those pieces, hoping to find out
 The mystery; but this ne'er done,
 The little light I had was gone.
 It grieved me much. At last said I,
 Since in those veils my eclipsed eye
 May not approach Thee,—for at night
 Who can have commerce with the light?—
 I'll disapparell, and to buy
 But one half-glance, most gladly dye."

This ideal faculty in Vaughan, this mystic longing to see the spiritual side of things, was combined with another power which seems quite opposed to it—a faithful eye to see and seize the exact form and features of natural things. Vaughan has been compared, for his mysticism, to William Blake. But there is this striking difference in their mysticism. In Blake it quite absorbs his powers of observation, as well as all his other faculties. "I assert for myself," says Blake, "that I do not behold the outward creation; to me it is hindrance." This was not at all the way with Vaughan. He rejoiced in rural sights and sounds for their own sake, and could reproduce them accurately and faithfully, without any subjective intrusion. The sound of waters, clouds with their shadows and gleams, and birds are special favorites with him. Here is his morning address to a bird:

Hither thou com'st, the busie wind all night
 Blew through thy lodging: where thy own warm wing
 Thy pillow was: and many a sullen storm,
 For which coarse man seems much the fitter born,
 Rained on thy bed,
 And harmless head;
 And now, as fresh and cheerful as the light,
 Thy little heart in early hymns doth sing."

But such dwelling on outward objects for their own sake is with Vaughan comparatively rare. Usually, he portrays them in their relation to the human spirit—the action of things on thought, and of thought on things. What Mr. Barrett Brown- ing finely said of Wordsworth is as true of Vaughan, "His eye is his soul." In the words of Coleridge, "To read the great book of Nature in a figurative sense, and to find therein correspondencies and symbols of the spiritual world," this which has been "the music of gentle and pious minds in all ages," was

Vaughan's peculiar delight. But for this characteristic of all high poetry, which is so strong in Vaughan, we have, after his time, to wait till it reappeared in the poetry of the nineteenth century.

It would have been pleasant to have lingered over his many allusions to his native Usk, over the "Waterfall," over his frequent images taken from birds and their ways, and over the beautiful surprises with which he startles and delights us, often in the midst of the plainest ground.

There is one poem to which I have not adverted, though it is one of the finest and most sustained of all Vaughan's poems. I mean that entitled "Communion with the Holy Dead," beginning thus:

"They are all gone into the world of light!
And I alone sit lingering here!
Their very memory is fair and bright,
And my sad thoughts doth clear."

But as it has found its way into almost every collection of poetry, and is known where nothing else about Vaughan is known, I may presume that it is familiar to all.

But I cannot conclude without referring to Vaughan's peculiar feeling about childhood, for of all his characteristics this is the most original and the most delightful. In his poem called "The Retreate" it is that he has expressed most fully the ideal light in which he looked back upon childhood.

"Happy those early dayes, when I
Shined in my angell infancy!
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy aught
But a white Celestial thought;
When yet I had not walkt above
A mile or two from my first love,
And looking back, at that short space,
Could see a glimpse of his bright face:
When on some gilded cloud or flowre
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity;
Before I taught my tongue to wound
My conscience with a sinfull sound,

Or had the black art to dispence
 A severall sinne to every sence,
 But felt through all this fleshly dresse
 Bright shootes of everlastingnesse.

O, how I long to travell back,
 And tread again that ancient track!
 That I might once more reach that plaine
 Where first I left my glorious traine;
 From whence the Inlightened spirit sees
 That shady City of Palm trees.
 But ah! my soul with too much stay
 Is drunk, and staggers in the way!
 Some men a forward motion love,
 But I by backward steps would move,
 And, when this dust falls in the urn,
 In that state I came return."

Here is a wonderful anticipation of the main conception of Wordsworth's great ode. The first to point this out was, as far as I know, Archbishop Trench, who, in the first edition of his "Household Book of English Poetry," wrote thus:

"This poem, apart from its proper beauty, has a deeper interest, as containing in the germ Wordsworth's still higher strain, namely, his ode on the 'Intimations of Immortality from the Revelations of Early Childhood.' I do not mean that Wordsworth had ever seen this poem when he wrote his. But the coincidences are so remarkable that it is certainly difficult to esteem them accidental; but Wordsworth was so little a reader of anything out of the way—and, at the time when his ode was composed, the 'Silex Scintillans' was altogether out of the way, a book of such excessive rarity that an explanation of the points of contact must be sought elsewhere."

That this was spoken rashly, the Archbishop learnt before the second edition of his Household Poetry Book appeared, for a correspondent informed him that he (the correspondent) had a copy of the first edition of the *Silex*, incomplete and very much damp-stained, which he had bought at a sale of Wordsworth's books. So Wordsworth, we may be sure, had read "The Retreate," and if he read it could not have failed to be arrested by it. No doubt, the whole conception is expanded by Wordsworth into a fullness of thought and a splendor of imagery which Vaughan has nowhere equaled. But the points of resemblance between the two poets are numerous and remarkable. The Platonic idea of ἀνάμνησις is at the root of both—the

belief that this is not our first state of existence, that we are haunted by broken memories of an ante-natal life. Indeed, this belief was held by Vaughan, and expressed in several of his other poems much more explicitly than it is by Wordsworth.

Mr. George Macdonald has closely compared "The Retreat" and Wordsworth's great ode, and has shown that if Wordsworth says,

"There was a time
When earth and every common sight
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,"

Vaughan has

"Happy those early days, when I
Shined in my angel infancy."

If Wordsworth speaks of a time when he was haunted by

"Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving about in worlds not realized,"

Vaughan recalls a time,

"Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race."

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy,"

says Wordsworth.

Vaughan speaks of being filled by

"A white celestial thought."

If Wordsworth says that

"Trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home,"

Vaughan speaks of his childhood as a time

"When yet I had not walkt above
A mile or two from my first love,
And looking back at that short space
Could see a glimpse of his bright face."

Wordsworth calls childhood

"the hour
Of splendor in the grass, and glory in the flower."

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Vaughan speaks of it as a time,

“When on some gilded cloud or flowre
My gazing soul could dwell an hour.”

But if there are these marked resemblances, there are differences hardly less marked. The fading of the early vision Wordsworth attributes to custom, lying upon the soul

“with a weight
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.”

Vaughan, on the other hand, traces it to a moral cause: to wit, his teaching

“his tongue to wound
His conscience with a sinfull sound,”

and learning

“the black art to dispence
A severall sinne to every sence.”

And Wordsworth has not brought home the sense of immortality present in the vivid feelings of childhood so penetratingly as Vaughan has done in these two consummate lines:

“And felt through all this fleshly dresse
Bright shootes of everlastingnesse.”

There is another poet who has touched very beautifully the subject of childhood,—I mean William Blake, in his “Songs of Innocence.” But between Blake’s treatment of it and that of the other two poets, there is this great difference: They, from their mature manhood, recall the bright instincts they had in childhood, and reflect, and even philosophize, upon them. Blake, on the other hand, throws himself entirely out of his present manhood, and prattles the very feelings he had as a child,—about the green fields, the lambs, the angels, and God. Some of these poems of Blake’s are, perhaps, the very best expression ever given to baby-life, its innocence, its simplicity, its happiness, its religiousness.

But some one may here interpose and say, Why all this fine talk about childhood; is it not a mere piece of sentimentalism, without any ground in reality? They who speak thus would seem to have a great authority upon their side. Mr. Matthew

Arnold, in the preface to his "Selections from Wordsworth," has said :

"The idea of the high instincts and affections coming out in childhood . . . this idea of undeniable beauty as a play of fancy has in itself not the character of poetic truth of the best kind ; it has no real solidity. The instinct of delight in Nature and her beauty had, no doubt, extraordinary strength in Wordsworth as a child ; but to say that universally this instinct is mighty in childhood, and tends to die away afterwards, is to say what is extremely doubtful. In many people, especially in the majority of educated persons, the love of nature is nearly imperceptible at ten years old, but strong and operative at thirty. In general, we may say of those high instincts of early childhood what Thucydides says of the early achievements of the Greeks, that probably they were no very great things."

Alas ! for poetry, if the perceptions of the so-called educated man are to be made its norm and canon. The ordinary educated man is apt to be a very artificial product, and unless he has to begin with some original spring of nature that lies deeper than his education, his sentiments and his judgments of poetry, as of other things, are, for the most part, strictly limited by the standards that pass current for the time in the circle to which he belongs. Judged even by so solid and respectable a faculty as ordinary common sense, poetry would fare but badly,—would be put down as something extravagant and fantastic,—“ a convenient way of talking nonsense.” It is probably true enough that to few has been granted a childhood so bright and imaginative as Vaughan, Blake, and Wordsworth could look back to ; that few persons in any generation could say that the poems above alluded to reproduce exactly their childhood's experience. Of course, the remembrance that each one has of his or her childhood must depend on the conditions which surrounded their home, —whether their childhood was passed in town or in the country, and whether in a beautiful or an unattractive neighborhood. But most persons of any sensibility who have spent some part of their childhood in a pleasant country must, I should think, in looking back, be aware that, next to the warmth of home affection and companionship, the things that most made their happiness were the sunshine, the green fields, the beasts and birds, the mountains, the clear streams, and the sea-shore. In the rural sights and sounds around them they rejoiced, though they knew not at the time what it was they rejoiced in. There are few, I suppose, who cannot recall from their childhood one or

two at least of "those heavenly days which cannot die," when the innocent brightness of the morning was about them, as yet undimmed by any shadow of mortality, and there were loving voices in the garden that have long been still. Such moments may have been few, as they were fleeting; but they must have thrilled us when they were here, else how could we recall them now? The remembrance of them may have waxed so faint that it seldom now revisits us, save perhaps for a moment, when reawakened by some long-forgotten tone or some scent that breathes of that early time. But no doubt they lie far down in most of us, those remembrances, buried fathoms deep, under layer on layer of custom, conventionality, commonplace, it may be, of worldliness. Is it not, then, one of the finest gifts of the true poet that he can pierce through those coatings with which later experience has incrustated our better nature, and re-awaken the child's heart that still slumbers within us? As Miss Annie Keary, one of the best of modern depicitors of childhood, has expressed it: "There is a mental atmosphere common to all children, which changes so gradually that only a few observers, or, rather, a few imaginative people, who have lived vividly the child-life, and so kept a good deal of its atmosphere embedded in their memory, ever succeed in bringing it back."

To have succeeded in bringing it back, this is the good office which Vaughan and Blake and Wordsworth have performed. Those fine and ethereal, yet evanescent instincts, which most men and women in childhood have in some measure shared, these poets have preserved in their hearts so tenaciously, and expressed in their poems so vividly, that they awaken, even in ordinary minds, some recollection of them. Can any poet render to his fellow-men a truer, more delicate, service?

There is, however, it must be noted, one thought about childhood in Vaughan which Wordsworth has not. It is this,—that hereafter in the perfected Christian manhood the child's heart will reappear. "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Vaughan's poem of "The Retreat" closes with the wish that

"When this dust falls to the urn,
In that state I came return."

Again, in another poem he calls childhood

"An age of mysteries, which he
Must live twice who would God's face see,
Which angels guard, and with it play,
Angels! whom foul men drive away."

It is a beautiful and, I trust, a true faith, that a day is coming when the soul shall put off all the incrustations it has gathered here, when we shall regain all that we have lost, and combine the matured wisdom of the man with all that is lovely in the child. And so our life is rounded both ways by a childhood—the imperfect childhood we pass through here—the perfect childhood which shall be hereafter.

J. C. SHAIRP.